



Teacher attitudes toward online assessment in challenging times

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Abstract. This paper explores and reports on teacher attitudes toward online assessment in foreign language teaching and learning in Spain and Finland. During the pandemic, teachers have had to face serious challenges, such as the method to be adopted, task design or handling student feedback, in order to ensure effective student assessment. They have had to find completely new ways to assess their students. A qualitative approach was adopted and data were gathered from a questionnaire shared on Google form, which was completed by 23 teachers from Spain and 11 from Finland. The aim was to examine (1) the advantages and disadvantages of using online assessment tools to measure students' progress, and (2) the participants' perceptions of their experience of assessing their students online. The findings show that while online assessment tools, especially quiz apps, provide instant feedback and correction for students and teachers, it is difficult to control what tools students might be using to support their learning and/or assessment assignments.

Keywords: assessment, online tools for language learning, teacher attitudes.

1. Introduction

Assessment plays a crucial role in all pedagogical programs, since it monitors students' learning progress via activities which aim to measure whether the learning outcomes match the intended results of the educational program. In this regard, Webber (2012) points out that assessment implies "activities designed primarily to foster student learning" (p. 202). Consequently, it cannot be denied that, as part

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of their professional development, teachers should design and use formative and summative assessment in their classroom.

Online assessment of students has long been established because of the online learning mode. Nevertheless, several studies (e.g. [Boitshwarelo, Reedy, & Bilany, 2017](#); [Brady, 2005](#)) have reported problems that have emerged and affected their good practice. The shift from face-to-face conventional classroom assessment to an online environment, caused by the outbreak of Covid-19, has had a significant effect on different facets of class assessment. Teachers have had to face serious challenges, such as the method to be adopted, task design or handling student feedback, in order to ensure effective student evaluation.

In view of the above-mentioned points, the two questions that guided the present study are the following.

- What are the perceived advantages and disadvantages of using online assessment tools to measure students' progress?
- How do teachers perceive their experience of online student assessment during challenging times?

2. Method

The current research examined how a group of 34 teachers (21 Spaniards and 11 Finns) teaching different online language courses (English, French, Finnish, Russian, Spanish, and Swedish) in primary, secondary, university, and private language school education used different digital assessment tools to assess their students online, and what their attitudes toward online assessment were. To select our participants in both countries, an email explaining the goal of our study was sent to different teachers in the different educational sectors mentioned above. The respondents were the cohort of the study. They were also asked to comment on the advantages and disadvantages of using online tools for this purpose.

A qualitative approach was adopted, and the participants were requested to complete a questionnaire, consisting of 19 questions, in order to appraise their views on (1) the different online assessment tools they use, (2) the advantages and disadvantages of online assessment, and (3) their experience of online assessment during the pandemic. The data collated were classified in order to match the two research questions.

3. Results and discussion

While 73.5% of the teachers were already using online assessment tools before Covid-19, around 40% had five or more years of experience with them, and 41.2% of the teachers self-evaluated themselves as experts, leaders, or pioneers (B2 to C2) in digital competence.

When asked what online tools they used for assessment, there were in total more than 60 different online tools that those teachers used for assessment. The most common ones were Kahoot, Moodle, Quizlet, Google Forms, Socrative, Flipgrid, and Mentimeter. These were used for various purposes; 91.2% of teachers employed them to assess writing, 82.4% for reading, 70.6% for speaking, and 58.8% for listening.

When the participants were asked an open-ended question about the advantages of using online assessment tools, many of them mentioned that they provide instant feedback for both students and teachers. They also reported that these online tools tend to be faster and that they allow for easier correction, a finding emergent in another study (Boitshwarelo et al., 2017). Therefore, teachers could have more free time to plan other constructive activities for their students. Furthermore, such online tools can permit teachers and students to work at any time and in any place, thereby helping students to feel more motivated and engaged in their tasks, since they can choose when to perform them. Progress can be monitored faster as instantaneous feedback is provided online in most cases, which can be useful for identifying students' strengths and weaknesses.

Our participants also mentioned that, once created, quizzes and similar tasks can be exploited ceaselessly among students of different groups without incurring any major extra work; also, it is easy to recycle materials year after year. One noteworthy observation was that the efficiency of such activities emanates from the ability to evaluate a wide range of topics in one test, compared with assessment where responses need to be constructed (Brady, 2005). Another benefit pointed out is the fact that no hard copies are needed, since task completion takes place online. This is a cheaper option for students because of not having to purchase different materials. Additionally, automatic correction was sometimes used by some of the teachers in their assessment of student task performance.

It was also argued that some applications like Socrative correct students' answers to their quizzes automatically and compile useful statistics about their performance, which saves teachers a great deal of time while also providing them with important

information, such as their students' progress in grammatical or lexical resources. Consequently, this feedback can be helpful for future task preparation.

In terms of the disadvantages of using online assessment tools to measure students' progress, the factor of trust emerged more than once. Many teachers felt that it is difficult to control what tools students might be using as a support for their online language tests and evaluation. As most of the apps employed by the participants do not seem to be convenient for providing feedback, online quiz tools such as Socrative might be more appropriate to this end. Some stated that the main drawback of almost all the applications available is that there is no guarantee that the person logging in to do the evaluation is, in fact, their student; as their cameras are turned off in certain cases, there exists the suggestion that cheating can be encouraged. Perhaps teachers should make their own choice regarding the online tools for their students in order that effective learning takes place; similarly, it might be advisable for students to have their cameras turned on while being assessed online.

Our participants also reported that some online tools do not allow for flexibility in assessing, for example, recognizing partially correct answers; moreover, creating such grading schemes would be technically very complex. In addition, they considered that designing tasks that use online assessment tools is often time-consuming, in terms of planning, creating, checking, testing, correcting, retesting, and so on.

Last but not least, one disadvantage relating to the physical state was highlighted. According to some teachers, working long hours online on a daily basis can put strain on the body, particularly the eyes.

4. Conclusions

This study provides novel insights into how teachers perceive the use of online assessment tools to monitor their students' progress. It has been noted that there is a wide range of tools that have proved to be useful in assessing students' progress in the receptive and productive skills, that is, reading, listening, writing, and speaking. One important point is that online assessment tools permit teachers and students to work where and when they choose. In other words, online assessment tools foster flexibility in learning, and teachers are afforded more free time to devote to planning activities that will be conducive for effective learning to take place. In some teachers' views, the best option would be a combination of online and face-to-face assessment for reliability and credibility. However, due to its small

scale, the findings of this study cannot be generalized, and more research should be conducted in this area to enhance both the teaching and learning activity.

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